

T **RACY QUAN**
HORIZONTAL DIARY: EX-HOOKER UNFOLDS



Tracy Quan contemplates a year of vertical planning.
 Photograph © Hamilton

Day 1

I'm in bed, sipping black coffee, contemplating my latest acquisition: a green leather Filofax. How '80s is that. You might love your up-to-the-minute Treo, but I'm uniquely attached to the portable three-hole punch of my organizer. It weighs less than a nail file. I'm going to carry it everywhere.

My new Filofax also has room for a 2008 Year Planner. Of course, I want it, but the one-page Planner comes two ways. Horizontal or vertical?

To amuse my Reagan-era customers, I used to call myself a supply-side nymphomaniac. Now I just write about it. So, maybe—in honor of my rehabilitation, to signify that I'm now an upright sort of girl—I should spring for the Vertical Year Planner.

To be on the safe side, I'll order both.

Day 2

Today, I was interviewed by one of those "family newspapers." The reporter told me that her boyfriend—her very respectable boyfriend—thinks she has the makings of a call girl. Everybody's man has a pimp fantasy these days!

"What's the difference between selling your body and selling a book?" she asked.

The three Rs, of course: royalties, reprints, and foreign rights. You can sell one book over and over again, in many countries and languages, to thousands simultaneously.

When I first discovered this, I was amazed.

It would be like collecting a royalty each time a customer reminisced about our sessions. (A great idea, but it's never going to happen in my lifetime.)

You can sell your body many times over to many different guys. But that's like selling one book at a time, and waiting for someone to finish reading it before you sell to the next person.

In other words, prostitution was more like a lending library than a bookstore, because I couldn't, as a call girl, sell six different editions of myself to six different men at the same time.

Day 3

The other night, a 20-something sex worker was holding forth at a bookstore on Allen Street. "I'm not selling my body," she said. "I'm selling my time." I used to make this distinction, too, but now I like to brag that I once sold my body.

Tonight, I had dinner with a food writer who fantasizes about selling his body.

"People think it's easy," I warned him "but it takes five years to really get good at it. Even if you have a natural talent. It took me five years to become proficient. I've heard that from lots of girls."

"That's how long it takes to establish a restaurant!" he said. "If a new restaurant can stay in business for five years straight, it stays in business forever."

This reminds me of the Hot Restaurant Theory of Hooking: Once you're past the start-up phase, the

trick is to think of your body as a very hot restaurant. You might have to get over some preconceptions. Maybe you see yourself as a very profitable potato field? Or a busy ice cream cart? That's how some beginners feel about their bodies.

When you outgrow the agricultural phase, you'll want to avoid being perceived as fast food. Instead, you're the latest hot restaurant. Some people can't even get a reservation. Those who can should feel privileged to be allowed in the door. They're special because you are. You have to believe your own hype.

My friend wants to talk about giving regulars a special dessert on the house.

"You're getting carried away," I told him. "If you start thinking that way before you have regulars, your restaurant will go bankrupt within five months."

Day 6

I haven't been able to sleep for two days, and it's all Sarah Dunant's fault. Ralph sent me her latest novel, *In the Company of the Courtesan*, and I'm almost finished. He says I remind him of Fiammetta Bianchini, Dunant's 16th century courtesan, because we both got started in our teens.

Ralph must be joking! Next to industrious Fiammetta, I'm a hopeless underachiever—berating myself for not becoming the owner of two homes (and a collection of power baubles) before the age of 20. Working girls grew up faster in the 1500s. At 20, I was still trying to establish myself. (That five-year thing!) Fiammetta's already the hottest restaurant in Rome, with top bishops and other Vatican types coming to her table—until the sack of Rome destroys her infrastructure. Her Venice abode proves handy, as do the rubies, when the house in Rome is pillaged by Lutherans.

The narrator, Bucino, a blatantly anti-Protestant dwarf, is Fiammetta's pimp. In Rome, he's more like her salaried butler or maître d'. When Fiammetta needs to reinvent

herself, she proposes a fifty-fifty split. Their partnership—strictly professional, no sex—is intimate yet businesslike. He's as frightened of failure and poverty as she is; both must rely on a combination of street smarts and bookish wit to re-establish themselves in Venice.

Bucino is frank about his physique. As a dwarf, he turns disadvantage into a talent, which becomes a valuable resource for Fiammetta, as well. If this novel becomes a movie, I nominate "Shorty the Pimp," an obscure '70s favorite by The Larks, as Bucino's anthem. (It was originally part of a never-released soundtrack for a blaxploitation movie.)

Bucino's take on city life is edifying. Venice in the 1530s—full of opportunity, outwardly conservative, with lots of well-connecteds dressed in black—reminds me of Manhattan. If you can make it here, well, you get the idea. But there's no place like Rome.

And he hates the weather.

Day 7

Today's courtesan is a creature of the Internet. Some courtesans blog, and I know of one who provides a link to her Amazon Wish List. (Even if you can't afford to meet her, you can send a token of admiration: a house-warming gift, a lace bra, the latest big novel.)

But I was never tempted to call myself a courtesan. Too *Masterpiece Theatre* for my taste. *Pretentious*, I once thought. Bucino, the 16th-century pimp-narrator, has forced me to reconsider. The

way he tells it, Fiammetta's situation is very much like that of a 21st century call girl. She's workmanlike, methodical, and has to advertise.

How does a pre-Internet, 15th-century courtesan hustle for new business? In Venice, Sunday mass is the perfect venue for displaying your wares to a captive audience. Fiammetta leaves them wanting more, and Bucino's careful to stay in the background when she makes her first appearance.

Day 8

The Horizontal and Vertical Planners have arrived. Who was I kidding? The Vertical Year is unrecognizable. It's wrong, unnatural, and strangely disjointed. Only the Horizontal Year, unfolding smoothly, like a reassuring, familiar menu, will do.